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Three's A Crowd

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Simon and Schuster

Extract

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1
The plan

D'you want to know the worst thing about having a totally amazing girlfriend?

What's he on about, you're asking? How can there be a worst thing? How can there even be a downside? Especially with Eve. She's beautiful and sexy and fun and sweet.

And she likes me back.

Well, there *is* a downside.

It's all the other guys. The ones who wish they were with her instead of me.

I guess she gets about six boys a day hitting on her. And that's just an ordinary school day. If we go to a party or a club I can't leave her for a minute without them swarming round her like wasps.

Drives me mad.

Eve doesn't see it. She says they're just chatting. Being

friendly. But I know better. I know they don't care about her, like I do. I know they're just after one thing.

Most blokes are like that. Eve's previous boyfriend, Ben, was always trying to get her to do it with him. Yeah, Ben. He didn't like it when he found out I'd been seeing Eve.

But that's another story. I don't want to think about all that. I just want to think about Eve.

Eve and me.

It was the last week of the summer term. Eve and I were meeting after school in the Burger Bar. I like it there – they play good music and sell big portions at cheap prices.

I walked in a bit late, thanks to a heated discussion with my form teacher who says if I don't work harder I'm going to fail all my GCSEs next year. I saw Eve straight away. I always see her first in any room. That's not some weird, psychic connection by the way. It's her hair. Catches the light – all sleek and blonde.

She was sitting at one of the booths, her head bent over a plastic sheet menu. I could just make out someone else's arm on the other side of the table. A male arm. Whoever it was must have been sitting slouched down – I couldn't see his head and shoulders – but there was definitely someone there. Someone flirting with her. As usual.

I strode over, psyching myself up for the necessary

get-out-of-here-this-is-my-girlfriend look I was about to give.

Then I saw who it was. Ryan. I breathed a sigh of relief. Ryan's pretty much my best mate. He's going out with my older sister, Chloe. In fact that's how we got to know each other – when he was after Chlo and I was after Eve a few months ago.

"Hi, Luke." Ryan grinned up at me from his bench. "Eve and I were just talking about you."

"Oh, yeah?" I looked over at Eve. She was blushing, like Ryan had really embarrassed her. God, she had to have the sexiest, poutiest mouth in the history of the world.

I couldn't look at that mouth without wanting to kiss it.

I slid in beside her and leaned across. *Mmmn.*

I could hear Ryan making puking noises across the table. I didn't care. Eve pushed me gently away. Her eyes sparkled up at me.

"So what were you saying about me?" I asked.

"Um . . ." Eve looked away.

"Wait till Chloe gets here." Ryan nudged Eve across the table. "I've just called her. She'll be here any minute."

I frowned, wondering what was going on. Then Eve took my hand and I forgot everything else.

"You're here early," I said. This was a running joke between us. Eve is always, always late for everything.

"I *was* early, actually." Eve smiled.

"Eve has news," Ryan said, looking like he was trying not to laugh.

"What?" I said.

"Wait for Chloe," Ryan said again.

"Jesus, Ry. What's going on?"

"Come on, man. You know Chloe. She'll be pissed off if she's left out of it."

This was undoubtedly true, though not what I was asking. Chloe's not a bad sister. But she's an unbelievably moody human being. Ryan is the only person I know who has any kind of influence over her. And even he struggles sometimes.

It was at this point that Chloe turned up.

Ryan smiled. "Hey Pig Baby," he drawled in an exaggerated American accent.

"Hi, Skankface." Chloe grinned as she leaned over to kiss him.

Eve and I exchanged glances. Neither of us really get the way Ry and Chloe seem to enjoy being rude to each other. Sometimes they even have these terrible rows, where one or both of them completely lose it. You think they'll never speak again. But the next time you see them, they're back to being all loved-up.

Eve and I don't do that. We're totally into each other. Always.

"So what's this big deal news?" I said.

"It's my dad," Eve said. "He wants me to spend the whole of August at his new hotel in Mallorca."

I blinked at her, my stomach twisting into a knot. "The *whole* of August?"

"Yeah." Eve stared down at the table. I guessed she knew what I was thinking. A whole month apart. And I was so looking forwards to having loads of time together – the summer holidays about to start. And now we'd have . . . what . . . ten days before the end of July – then she'd have to go.

"Sounds cool," Chloe said. "Will your dad expect you to work at the hotel?"

Ryan broke into a fit of coughing.

"Yeah," Eve explained, still staring at the table. "I'll have to help out waiting tables and sorting things out by the pool and maybe even working in the crèche . . . but I guess it's still four weeks in Spain."

My heart was sliding down into my shoes. I was wrong. Four weeks away from me and she didn't even seem all that bothered.

Ryan recovered from his coughing fit.

"Does your dad run the place, then?" he said.

Eve nodded.

"Lots of staff?"

"Yeah – especially over the summer. He gets masses of English tourists, so. . ."

". . .he has to hire extra help," Chloe finished. She raised her eyebrows. "Mmmn. Imagine the buff Spanish pool boys."

I glared at her.

"Bet the girls are hot, too," Ryan added. "Go on, Eve."

Eve paused. "Actually my dad doesn't usually hire girls to work for him. He says they're too distracting for the male staff. And sometimes there are problems with the guests too. You know, middle-aged men trying it on. It's supposed to be a family place, so my dad tries to . . . to stop trouble starting by not hiring girls."

"Yet he's happy for *you* to go and work there?" I said, unable to control the angry shake in my voice. The idea of Eve being away for four weeks was bad enough. But knowing she'd be the only girl working in a hotel full of hot, pervy, Spanish guys and lecherous British tourists was unbearable."What about your mum? Won't she mind?"

But I already knew the answer to that. Eve's mum was nice, but basically pathetic. As far as I could gather from the stories Eve told me, she'd never stood up to Eve's dad once.

Eve wouldn't meet my eyes. I stared at her, Ryan and Chloe forgotten. Her lips twitched. *Jesus.* Was she laughing at me?

I sprang to my feet, feeling utterly humiliated. "Great,"

I said sarcastically. "Hope you have a great time. Send me a postcard."

I turned to walk away. Eve grabbed my wrist.

"Luke," she said. "Stop. We're just messing around."

I turned back to her, pulling my arm free. "What?"

I caught sight of Ryan and Chloe – they were leaning against each other, shaking with silent laughter.

"I'm sorry," Eve said. "Listen, my dad loves girls." She blushed. "Too much, in fact. I certainly won't be the only one working there. But that's not the point."

"I don't get it." I looked from her to Ryan and Chloe.

"Sorry, man." Ryan grinned. "It was my idea. I called Chloe and told her before you arrived."

"But. . . ?"

"For God's sake, Luke," Chloe sighed. "You are so easy. I mean, have you ever heard of a hotel that refuses to employ women?"

I shrugged, my face burning. It's not that I can't take a joke. Just, I don't like people taking the piss out of the way I feel about Eve.

Especially when Eve does it.

"That's not all," Eve reached out for my arm again. "Luke?" I looked at her. Her face was stricken. "I'm really sorry. Listen, it's brilliant. My dad said I could bring some friends if I wanted. That's the real news."

"What is?" I said.

"We're all invited. You, me, Ry and Chloe. Dad said it was okay. I mean, we'll have to do a bit of work while we're there, but we'll have loads of free time. The staff are mostly around our age and the hotel's got a virtually private beach. He says it's beautiful."

I sat down slowly, letting Eve wrap her arms round my neck.

"You mean we're *all* going, for all four weeks?" Relief was seeping through my feelings of anger and humiliation, washing them away.

Eve nodded, her eyes sleepily, sexily, inviting me to kiss her.

A smile crept round my mouth.

"If Mum says it's okay," Chloe said.

I drank in Eve's face again. "Oh, I'm sure that's not going to be a problem." I moved closer to her lips, suddenly feeling exhilarated. This was better than my wildest dreams. A whole month with Eve. In the same building. Not even having to go home at night. And August in Spain. It would be hot and. . .

"Luke." Chloe's voice barged into my mental picture of Eve sprawled across a beach in a bikini.

"What?" I said irritably.

"Put it away, dumb ass. The waitress is waiting to take your order."

2

Baby talk

Term ended. Mum had said she would think about the August holiday plan for a couple of days. I wasn't worried. I mean, what possible reason could she have for forbidding me and Chloe a free holiday?

And then I found the pregnancy test stick.

It was peeking out from under the other rubbish in the bathroom bin – a slim white cylinder with two holes on one side, each containing a thin blue line. I wasn't one hundred per cent sure what it was at first but Eve confirmed my suspicions when she turned up half an hour later. She took the cylinder carefully at the tips and examined it closely. She looked up at me with wide, fearful eyes.

"D'you think it's Chloe?"

"Who else?" I said.

I'd never thought before about how far Chloe and Ryan

had gone. I mean, they saw each other all the time but then so did Eve and I. And we weren't having sex. *Jesus.* I didn't want to think about it. Chloe's my *sister.*

"I'm going to ask her." Eve got up. "Is Ryan in there?"

I nodded. Eve walked across the landing and into Chloe's bedroom.

A minute later Chloe herself poked her head round the door.

"Luke," she said. "Come in here."

I dragged myself reluctantly towards her room. I couldn't imagine anything she might be about to say that I wanted to hear.

Chloe yanked me inside and shut the door. Eve and Ryan were sitting at opposite ends of the bed. They both looked up at me solemnly.

"It's not mine." Chloe shoved the little stick under my nose.

I stared at her. "But. . . ?"

"It's Mum. Gotta be."

My mouth dropped open. "No way," I said. "That's . . . that's . . . ew, that's disgusting."

"Well . . ." Eve raised her eyes. "It's certainly possible."

Matt.

My dad died seven months ago – January. That's where I first saw Eve, in fact – at his funeral. Matt was Dad's best friend.

Some friend.

He started trying to get it on with Mum almost immediately. Within two months they were going out together.

He's an idiot. A total prat.

"God, if they're having a baby he'll be unbearable," I groaned. "He sticks his nose in our business all the time anyway."

"Looks like he's stuck more than his nose in this time," Ryan smirked.

I gritted my teeth.

"Stop it, Ry," Chloe snapped. "We don't even know if it's true."

Ryan shrugged. "Well, go and ask your mum then," he said, flopping back on the bed.

Chloe and I left the others and traipsed downstairs.

We found Mum in the kitchen, taking a hunk of cheese out of the fridge. I prodded Chloe. No way was I doing the talking on this one.

"Mum?" Chloe cleared her throat.

Mum looked up from the fridge, a jar of pickle now in her hand.

"Sandwich?" she said.

"Food cravings?" I muttered under my breath.

"Is there anything you want to tell us?" Chloe said.

Mum stared at us, guiltily. Then her face cleared. "You

mean the holiday?" she said. "Well, I've given it a lot of thought. I'm happy for you to go, but there's one condition."

I forgot about the pregnancy test stick. "What?"

Mum put the jar of pickle next to the cheese on the counter. "Homework," she said. "Every day."

"What?" Chloe snapped. "I've just sat my GCSEs – I'm not doing any freakin' homework."

"I didn't mean you." Mum narrowed her eyes. "It's you, Luke. Your report is terrible. All the teachers say you're going to fail your exams next year unless you make more effort."

I remembered my heated discussion with my form teacher from a few days ago. *You have the ability, Luke. Why won't you apply yourself?*

"I've got some Maths and English papers off the school. I want you to work on them over the holidays. Three hours every day." Mum said. She picked up a little knife and chopped a nugget of cheese off the chunk on the counter.

I couldn't believe it. "No way," I shouted. "That's *so* not fair."

"Fair or not, it's what's happening," Mum said. "If I don't get an email every day by two p.m. containing your work I will insist that Eve's father puts you on the next flight home."

I stared at her, open-mouthed.

"Mum," Chloe said. "Are you having a baby?"

Mum dropped her cheese knife onto the counter. I winced. Only Chloe would've come out with it like that.

"What?" Mum gaped at us. "How . . . how did you know?" she faltered.

Chloe glanced at me. I looked at the floor.

Chloe explained.

Mum stammered a bit as she told us the baby – due early next year – had come as a bit of a shock.

No shit, Mum. I was now fairly eager to leave the room. There's something totally gross about your mother having a baby, if you think about it too much. And then there was Dad. He'd only been dead seven months. I didn't want to think about that either. About how he would feel.

Chloe clearly had no such qualms. "What about Dad?" Her voice rose angrily. "I mean, are you even sure it's Matt's?"

Jesus. I started backing towards the door.

"Of course it is," Mum snapped. "And I don't appreciate you. . ."

I left the kitchen before Mum and Chloe started shouting at each other. I went back up to Chloe's room and pushed open the door, my head still reeling.

Eve was standing at the window, leaning against the sill.

Ryan was lying back on Chloe's bed, hands under his head, staring up at the ceiling. It suddenly occurred to me that they'd been on their own together for at least ten minutes. They didn't look like they'd just torn apart from a lustful clinch, but still. . .

I squinted at Eve. She was staring at me, looking puzzled. *God*, she was hot. I glanced over at Ryan suspiciously. He wasn't obviously good-looking – wide mouth, long, sloping nose – but I knew most girls found him incredibly attractive. There was this laidback air about him and, if flirting was a sport, Ryan would be an Olympic gold medallist. Earlier this year he'd told me about these six steps which, he claimed, would get me any girl I wanted.

Get me Eve.

Of course it was all bullshit – Ry was just making it up to have an excuse to come round to our house and see Chloe. Still, most of what he said worked. And I had got Eve. Hadn't I?

"Well?" Eve said. "Is your mum really pregnant?"

"Yes," I said. "Now, d'you want the *really* bad news?"

It was the morning we were leaving for Spain. I was all packed, my bag weighed down by the ton of homework papers Mum insisted I was going to have to work my way

through. Apparently she'd made sure there'd be a networked computer somewhere in the hotel for me to work on every morning. I still couldn't believe I was going to have to sit inside and study while everyone else had fun by the pool.

"Never mind," Eve had said. "We'll still have all afternoon and all evening."

This was true. In fact, the thought of it was what was keeping me going.

A soft rap on the door. "Luke?" Matt stuck his head into the room. "Can I have a word?"

I shrugged. My usual way of dealing with Matt was to pretend he didn't exist. I avoided speaking to him unless it was absolutely necessary, and we hadn't talked at all since I'd found out about the baby.

What was there to say?

The bottom line was that I hated the fact Mum was with Matt. None of the rest of it seemed real yet. Certainly not the idea of an actual baby. The one thing I had wanted to know was whether Mum getting pregnant meant Matt would move in with us. But Mum had said no – that they'd come to terms with the baby, blah, blah, blah, but that it was too soon after Dad for them to think about living together, blah, blah, blah, and that Matt still wanted his own space.

I'd said nothing, but inside I was deeply relieved. Matt coming round was bad enough. Matt in the house full-time didn't bear thinking about.

"Your mum wanted me to talk to you before you left." Matt strolled across the room to the table in the corner. He picked up a pen and, turning to face me, rolled it in his hand.

"What about?"

"You know," he said. His face flushed a little.

I stared at him. *No. I don't.*

Matt tapped the pen against his hand.

"I don't have kids," he said, looking down at the floor.

"Yet," I added, pointedly.

Matt glanced up at me. "Er . . . right . . . yet. But I was your age once so I know what it's like."

What was he going on about?

"When you're on holiday, it's easy to get . . . er . . . carried away and well. . ." Matt's face went a deeper shade of red. "Your mum wants you to be careful."

It suddenly hit me.

Sex.

Jesus. He was talking about me and Eve having sex.

Which we weren't. Unfortunately.

Which was none of his business.

"Why didn't Mum talk to me herself?" My chest tightened.

God, the nerve of him. Lecturing me on "being careful".

"I guess she thought it would be easier for you to hear it from me." Matt tapped the pen faster against his hand. "Man to man."

"You mean she thought you'd be a good person to talk to me about . . . about . . . being *responsible*?" I raised my eyebrows.

Matt looked a little confused. "Well . . . er . . . yes, I. . ."

Unbelievable.

"Yeah. Well," I said sarcastically. "I can see why she thought you'd be a good person to explain how to avoid getting my girlfriend pregnant."

Matt shot a look at me. His face was almost purple. "Look, there's a big difference between you and Eve and what happened with us. We're adults, for a start, so—"

"Oh." I glared at him. "So getting someone pregnant by mistake's okay if you're old, is it?"

"Fine." Matt pushed himself away from my table. He clenched his fists, still holding onto my pen. "I'm sure your mum'll be pleased to hear about your attitude. Maybe she'll have a rethink about letting you go."

Bastard. How could you have ever been my dad's friend?

I itched to punch his stupid face.

Matt strode to the door.

No. Shit. No way was I going to let him stop me going on this holiday. "Wait."

Matt stood in the doorway. He turned round slowly and tapped my pen against his cheek. "Yes?"

"I'm sorry." I swallowed down my rage. "Tell Mum I'll be careful."

Unlike you were, you disgusting, pathetic excuse for a man.

A triumphant grin spread across Matt's face.

God. I hated him.

"Good." Matt chucked the pen at me and left.

I told Eve about the conversation with Matt while we waited for our flight at the airport. She looked totally amazing in this little strappy top she was wearing. Deeply sexy and yet somehow innocent at the same time.

"He was probably just trying to help," she said.

I frowned. "It's none of his business what we do," I said. "Is it?"

The truth was I was half hoping that Eve might be as annoyed by Matt as I had been. Maybe even annoyed enough to rethink her "not yet" position on sex.

This position was something that our relationship was based on – her previous boyfriend, Ben, had pushed her hard to go all the way. When Eve and I had started going

out properly, she'd explained to me that sex just wasn't an option – yet. In fact, one of the main reasons she'd liked me was that I hadn't been pushy about it. That I'd agreed to wait for her to tell me when she felt differently.

I was still waiting.

Eve grinned. My heart sank. She didn't look the slightest bit annoyed. "Who cares what Matt says," she said. "We're going to have such a great time together." She leaned over and kissed me. Her tongue flickered lightly in my mouth, sending about a zillion megahertz of lust zapping straight to my groin. She pulled back and I opened my eyes. She was giving me this big, sexy smile. I watched the strap of her top slide off her smooth, creamy shoulder.

Oh, God. She was a drug. I was an addict. Waiting didn't come into it. It was irrelevant. I'd take however much she gave me. As often as she'd give it.

"D'you want a drink?" Eve pulled the strap of her top back up and peeled herself out of her seat.

I shook my head, turning round to watch as she sauntered over to the coffee bar. The young guy who was serving leaned on the counter to talk to her. Even though I couldn't see Eve's face, I knew she was smiling at him. Jealousy twisted in my stomach.

The coffee bar jerk stared at her bum the whole time she was walking back to me. *Jesus.* I helped her gulp down her

frappucino, then suggested we went to the gate for the flight.

"Why?" Eve looked irritated. "We've got loads of time."

Because I can't stand being here with that guy horning after you.

We caught sight of Ryan and Chloe snogging near the duty free shop. "Look at them," I muttered. "Don't they ever stop?"

Eve laughed her gorgeous, throaty laugh. "You can talk."

I stared at her. What did she mean? Was she saying I was too all over her? Was she saying she didn't want that? I looked around. Men everywhere were lusting after her. Some out of the corner of their eye. Some quite openly. When we first started seeing each other I remember liking the fact that she was so desirable. Now it just made me feel under pressure.

Under pressure to be better than the rest of them. The other guys.

Eve and Chloe went off to buy some magazines. I slumped into one of the airport lounge seats and listened to some music. After a few tracks I switched off my iPod and opened my eyes.

No sign of Eve.

"They're buying perfume now," Ryan said, stretching

out his legs in the seat opposite. "To attract the buff Spanish pool boys."

I stared at him, wondering how he could possibly be thinking that and looking so relaxed.

"Don't you mind?" I said.

"What? That Chloe fancies the idea of other guys?" Ryan grinned. "Be weird if she didn't, wouldn't it? We do. Other girls, I mean."

I shook my head. "That's different."

"Why?" Ryan laughed at me.

I shrugged. It was too hard to explain. Of course *I* noticed and fancied other girls. It was like a knee-jerk reaction that had nothing to do with how I felt about Eve. But for *her* it was different. If she wanted someone else, she'd get them – no question. And if she got them . . . I chewed on my lip. I'd go mad if I let myself even think about it.

Ryan leaned forwards, his fringe flopping over his eyes. "You need to calm down, man," he said. "Seriously. The worst thing you could do is get all clingy with her. Girls hate that."

He sat back. I jammed my earphones right into my ears and sank deeper into my seat.

3

Meeting Jonno

Towards the end of the two-and-a-half hour flight, Eve started fidgeting in her seat. Then she disappeared into the aeroplane toilet for so long I started to get worried she'd fainted or something.

At last she re-emerged. She'd changed out of the sexy, strappy top into a pink dress, a big T-shirty sort of thing with a teddy bear on the front.

"Why've you put that on?" I said.

"My dad got it for me." She sat back down next to me. Her forehead creased with an anxious frown. "Does it look okay?"

I stared at her. Eve was one of the least vain people I'd ever met. I couldn't remember the last time she'd talked about what she was wearing or asked me how she looked.

I took in the pink dress. It was a bit shapeless though at